



Dads' UNI

Understanding, Nurturing, Imparting

**DADS' UNI's
52 TIPS FOR FATHERS**



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TIP 1. A FATHER'S HEART

Being an expectant father is an experience that is incredibly life changing, and because it is life changing, can also be a little scary for some. For many men self-doubts and fears try to rise in their hearts when they first hear of their wife's pregnancy. This is often experienced because they are now venturing out into the mysterious and unknown 'realms of fatherhood'.

The question many ask themselves is 'Can I really do this?' or 'What if I make some huge mistake?' These questions are normal for anyone who is striking out on a new venture, whether it is starting their own business or beginning a family. It is often helpful for men to know that they are not alone in these thoughts or fears, but they are common to all men.

For men to be good at something in life it is important for them to enjoy it, and if we would prosper in our role as a father, we need to find that place of enjoyment in our hearts. What we really believe on the inside, about who we are and what we can do as a man, will either set us free or bind us up and restrict us.

Man is designed by God to grow up from being a boy, to become a man and to take on the role of being a father, so that he can have his own children and begin the process all over again. This process has remained unchanged from the time of creation, and billions of men have taken part in it. It is a natural part of life, and certainly nothing to be feared.

You can be confident that within your heart there is the ability to be a father, and to prosper in this role, all you need to do is to find it.

Dads' Call to Action:

When you pick up your new-born baby in your arms, and you see those little hands that are shaped like yours and know that this child has come from your seed, when you realise that this little one loves you without reservation and is totally dependent upon you for life, then the heart of a father will shine forth.

(Proverbs 21 v 1)

The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord,

Like the rivers of water;

He turns it wherever He wishes.

TIP 2. LOVE AND BE COMMITTED TO YOUR WIFE

There is no doubt that a large proportion of successful 'Parenting' revolves around creating a home environment that is secure and lasting. One of the most important elements required in developing this type of home environment, is having a solid foundation in your relationship and commitment to your children's mother.

The security of knowing that mum and dad love each other can settle many childhood fears and anxieties and release a peace into a child's heart that imparts confidence and self-esteem. Many children from broken homes lack this peace and confidence and are disadvantaged greatly in life. Whether you are raising boys or raising girls a stable and loving home environment is crucial if we are to succeed as a family.

The statistics on marriage these days are merely a reflection of the lost values in our society, and no matter what anyone may try to tell you, a child needs the love of both parents constantly to mature intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

The Bible teaches that marriage is for life, not just when it is convenient or feels good. A wise man once told me that in marriage " Your Commitment Will Keep Your Love, Love Will Not Keep Your Commitment" Christian marriage is a covenant or solemn vow between a man and a woman to love and to cherish each other, to give their lives for each other until they are parted by death.

All other physical relationships are like a house that is built upon sand, eventually it will come crashing down. Within Christian marriage, where there is an abundance of love and mutual respect and honour, children prosper and grow to be the best they can be.

Because of the hardness of our human hearts many of us choose what seems 'the easy way out' and get a divorce rather than humble ourselves and work through the problems that every couple face. The grass is not greener on the other side, and unfortunately it is often the children that suffer the most from divorce.

Dads' Call to Action:

Renew your commitment to your wife daily. Confess privately " I love and am committed to my wife, and I'm in love with my wife!"

(Ephesians 4: 2-3)

...with all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

TIP 3. CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF PEACE IN THE HOME

There is no doubt that as fathers, and heads of the family home, we have authority and a parenting responsibility to establish the way we want our home to run. One of the most basic and important elements required in a home, is to develop an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

Raising children is a challenge in our modern times whether our child is currently a newborn baby, a toddler or a teenager. Creating a peaceful environment within the home can help minimise conflict between siblings and be the difference between war and peace among the family members. Unless the head of the home establishes guidelines and boundaries for behaviour and relationships within the home, modern life and stresses will quickly send the environment spiralling downward.

In every home there is an environment or atmosphere, it is often sensed more than understood. I remember a certain atmosphere every time I went to visit my grandparent's home, it was an atmosphere of peace.

Many people today grow up in an atmosphere of turmoil and have rarely experienced living in a peaceful environment. But once you get a taste of it, you will always desire it, and it is achievable for every home. Creating a peaceful atmosphere in the home begins with establishing some basic ground rules, which need to be followed by all who live there. These ground rules cover areas such as noise levels, personal privacy, and most importantly personal relationships.

If there are unresolved issues between the members of the family, although the home might be quiet, still there will be no peace. One of the most important guidelines for family peace and unity is to deal with issues quickly and not allow them to be submerged under the radar.

Dads' Call to Action:

Be an example to all in the household by dealing with issues that arise calmly and consistently and teach your family members to do the same. This will set the guidelines for the others to follow.

(Ephesians 4v26)

"Be angry, and do not sin": "do not let the sun go down on your wrath,"

(Proverbs 15v1)

A soft answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger.

(Proverbs 17v14)

The beginning of strife is like releasing water;
Therefore, stop contention before a quarrel starts.

TIP 4. SPEAKING WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

A home is like a plant conservatory, a place where if we create the right environment, the plants inside will prosper and grow. Every plant conservatory requires the correct ratios of sunlight, water and nutrients in the soil to help the vegetation prosper, and for individual plants those ratios may vary.

So, it is for your children, each child has specific and individual needs, whether they be emotional, physical, intellectual or spiritual, and it may take a period to get the balance right. Gardeners who grow indoor plants like succulents and orchids need different knowledge and experience than those who look after an orchard of fruit trees. Discovering the individual requirements of each child helps us as parents in raising resilient children.

There are many elements that are found in happy homes, and one that is common is "speaking words of encouragement". Children thrive on encouragement, and by consistently speaking words of encouragement we as fathers can shape young lives in a positive way.

By speaking words like " How are you today Champ?", " How's my beautiful Girl?", "You Can Do It!", " I Believe In You", "Well Done!", "Try Again, You'll Do Better Next Time" or " How About We Work On That Together And See If We Can't Get An Improvement Next Time", we are shaping young lives and preparing them for success in life.

When we encourage our children, we give them courage to 'win in life'. We build up their self-esteem and self-worth and strengthen them for the next challenge in life that they will face. Children that are encouraged by their fathers are far more resilient and confident as they go through life.

If we discourage our children, we will take the courage they need to win in life from them and may severely limit their future by negatively affecting their self-image. As heads of the home, fathers have a unique position of influence over their children. If "Daddy loves me, and believes in me", then for a child, all things are possible.

Dads' Call to Action:

Always be on the lookout for opportunities to speak kind and encouraging words to your children. This will develop an atmosphere where your children can grow and flourish in life.

(Colossians 3 v 21)

Fathers do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

(Ecclesiastes 12 v 11)

The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.

(Proverbs 15 v 23)

A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is

TIP 5. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Being a father means being in a position of leadership, and like it or not, every leadership role in life has both rights and responsibilities e.g. You have the God given right as the head of the house, but you also have the responsibility of ensuring your family follows the correct path in life. Choosing a parenting style that assists you in fulfilling this responsibility is paramount if we are to be successful as a dad.

God is our heavenly Father and He has appointed us as men a great task, and that task is to follow His example in raising our children. As fathers we must give an account of our stewardship before God, as to how we fulfilled this high calling. Thankfully we have access to the infinite grace and wisdom of God found in the Bible, to help and encourage us as dads as we make a multitude of parenting decisions throughout the years.

Children are a gift from God, on loan from heaven for a time, and we as fathers have the responsibility to prepare them both for life on this earth and life eternal. To ensure that we can do the best possible job in their preparation we need both earthly and heavenly wisdom.

Dads' Call to Action:

Weigh up your actions before you proceed, as to whether they are acceptable in God's sight.

(Galatians 4 v 1)

Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

TIP 6. STARTING EARLY

We've probably all heard the adage 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks', and although I do believe that we are able to change at any age if we apply ourselves, this saying does have an element of truth. Change is often found to be more difficult once the patterns of life and attitudes have been set and established in a person.

When a baby is born on this earth, although he or she arrive with their own personality and certain character traits, they are predominantly a clean canvas that needs to be written upon. From early childhood our life experiences begin to write upon the canvas that makes up much of our self-image, our belief systems, and how we relate to other people.

It is our responsibility as the parents of the child to ensure that those things that are written upon the canvas of our children's lives are beneficial and not detrimental in the long term. As there are so many negative influences that are in the world today that can potentially harm our children, it is vitally important that we take up the role as the chief artist and not leave it to someone else.

If our children are left for extended periods of time in the hands of others, such as day care centres etc. then we are allowing those working there to become the chief artists in our child's life. This can potentially be a very dangerous situation unless we know just about everything about all the staff that work there, including what they believe and their lifestyles.

Some children left in day care centres for extended periods bond closer with the child care workers than with their own parents, this can potentially lead to severe emotional and relational problems later in life. I'm sure that there are many excellent day care centres in our nation, with childcare workers who are really committed to helping parents raise their children, but there is no-one more qualified to take care of your children than you.

It is important to realise that we are writing upon the canvas of our children's lives every day, and to make each brush stroke count. If we are diligent and careful in our work then our children will come forth as a masterpiece that we can be proud of, and a masterpiece which will thank us in later life for our input. I'm sure that famous artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and Pablo Picasso didn't just haphazardly apply random brush strokes to their canvasses, and as parents we need to follow their example if we also are to create our own masterpiece.

But if we don't take up the role to teach and train our children for life, then we can be sure that negative life circumstances or other people will. If this happens to our children, we may not be pleased with the result and they may be severely hampered in life.

Dads' Call to Action:

Think seriously about the influences you intend to allow in your child's life and realise that as the child's parent you are the best qualified to have that input.

(2 Corinthians 3 v 2-3)

You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

TIP 7. ALWAYS HONOUR YOUR WIFE IN FRONT OF YOUR CHILDREN

Establishing an environment of mutual respect and honour within the home is a vital element in the overall development of our family structure. Without mutual respect and honour it is too easy for disruptive and negative elements to take a hold in the relational mix which makes up a family. Adopting a parenting style that values every member of the family helps us build emotionally resilient children.

'Giving Honour Where Honour Is Due' is important in developing a relational framework that will continue to build up and strengthen the family. Your wife's role within the family needs to be appreciated and shown respect, as does your role as father. As you build up and honour your wife in front of the children, you strengthen the entire family.

It is important not to 'put down or criticise' your wife, especially in front of the children, as this will begin to erode the fabric of mutual respect and honour. If we do, the children may begin to think it acceptable behaviour for them to 'put down' other members of the family.

This negative element, once it has entered the 'acceptable behaviour' of the family will spread like a cancerous growth and will ultimately result in the children 'putting down' the mother and father as well.

It is also important for the children to hear your 'words of praise' for your wife regularly, as this will reinforce their own honour and respect for her. Appreciating her cooking and hard work, or some of the many other things that she does daily whether in the workplace or in the home, will help her to feel valued and important as well.

Saying things like "Thank you sweetheart for this lovely dinner", or "Hey kids, isn't your mum the best!", "Mum works so hard to take care of us all", "We love you Mummy!" and teaching the children to do it as well, only takes a moment, but has far reaching and beneficial results within the family. Your wife will feel 'like a million dollars' and this will continue to strengthen and bless your marriage as well.

Dads' Call to Action:

Try to say something nice about and to your wife daily, especially in the hearing of the children.

(Exodus 20 v 12)

"Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

(Proverbs 15 v 20)

A wise son makes a father glad,
But a foolish man despises his mother.

TIP 8. DEFINING BOUNDARIES

It is the father's role to set the 'boundaries or guidelines' for the family, and the rules that operate within those boundaries. These should be discussed and agreed upon initially with your wife, as it takes a team effort to establish them within a home. Positive discipline within a home begins when both parents agree on a parenting plan and continue to support each other in establishing it within the family.

Clearly defined boundaries assist everyone within the family to know what is expected of them, how far they can go, and what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, within the family. As our children grow from toddlers, through childhood and into adolescence having clear boundaries in place within the family structure is a stabilising influence.

A boundary line in the natural world shows us how far we can go legally, what belongs to me, and what belongs to others. If we buy a property from someone, one of the first questions we need to resolve is "Where are the boundary lines?"

If I know where the property begins and ends, then what I am considering purchasing, is clearly defined in my mind. This may well be a crucial point of consideration, especially if I need some extra ground to put in a pool etc. If the boundary lines are not clearly defined, and the answer I receive is vague or "over there somewhere", then doubts will arise as to what I am really getting in this purchase.

One of the most important points in setting the boundaries, as to what is, and what is not acceptable within the family, is the element of consistency. We need to consider carefully where we want the boundary to exist, and why, before we set it, as changing pre-set boundary lines is much more difficult. If we start changing the rules all the time, then confusion and frustration will appear within the family.

This does not mean that the boundary lines cannot evolve as the children grow in maturity and responsibility, but it is vital that each change is discussed and clearly explained to the family before it becomes 'law'.

Dads' Call to Action:

Take some quality time and discuss with your wife the boundaries and rules you are going to set within your family. Once they are set, be consistent in enforcing them.

(Deuteronomy 6 v 6)

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

TIP 9. THE ELEMENT OF FAITH

To build a strong family unit we must first lay a firm foundation, to ensure that it can stand the test of time and survive through the difficulties that life inevitably brings. Many modern parenting styles are more focused upon ensuring the children freedom to do whatever they want without interference rather than offering guidance and direction. I believe this is one of the reasons why many young people lack vision and hope in their lives and often act out of frustration and anger.

God didn't create us then just leave us to work out the meaning of life ourselves, He has clearly laid down a path for us to travel. This path is available freely for all and is based on the truth that is found in the Holy Bible.

Jesus told a story of 2 men who were builders, one chose to build his house on sand, while the other chose to build his house on rock. When the adversities of life began to beat upon those houses, only the house that was built on the rock was able to stand.

Jesus went on to teach that hearing God's word and doing it was like building your house on the rock, it has a strength that accompanies it, a strength that can make your house stand. The strength that we draw upon is God's unfailing love and faithfulness in fulfilling the promises in 'His' Word, The Bible.

For those who have made a Christian commitment and entered God's family, all the promises of God are available to access. These promises must be drawn upon by using the elements of faith, trust and patience.

Faith is the ability to honestly see/perceive and believe things that are invisible to the naked eye. It is an ability that we all have, but like most things in life starts in seed form and must grow to fruition.

Many of us start with a dream in life, a goal or an aim, that we want to achieve as a man. If we keep that dream or goal alive within us, and don't let the fire be snuffed out by circumstances, then we will draw the fulfilment of that dream to ourselves. This is the element of faith working in us. If we can grasp the element of faith, then to us nothing shall be impossible.

Dads' Call to Action:

Read the Bible daily to find out what the promises of God are for you and your family. Once you have found a promise in the scriptures, spend time meditating or pondering that promise, and allow it to begin to grow inside you. Be patient and continue to believe that promise even if circumstances may seem to be contrary, and in time you will see a fulfilment of the promise.

(Hebrews 11 v 6)

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him.

(Matthew 7 v 24-27)

"Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

TIP 10. THE PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness in a human heart is as vital as the blood that flows in our veins, without it, life as it was designed to be, stops. Both the giving and receiving of forgiveness needs to be present for a man to live free and enjoy life to the fullest. When this process is not present, our lives begin to stagnate like a swamp, rather than flow like a river. Effective parenting styles need to include an understanding of the importance of the process of forgiveness, and its role in maintaining and strengthening family relationships.

Jesus taught that it was 'impossible that offences would not come' in this present world system, so we as men need to be prepared emotionally and mentally, so we will know what to do when offences arrive. I suspect that most of us would have been offended or hurt already in life, by what someone said or did, or failed to do, but this does not mean that we must carry around that hurt forever inside us.

If you have never been offended or hurt by anyone in this world, then hang around a little longer, I'm pretty sure someone will come by soon. I can usually tell when I have been hurt or offended by someone, because when I think of, or see that person, I feel the hurt on the inside.

I may want to walk on the other side of the road to avoid having to speak to them, or similar sounding situations. They all point to the fact that I have been offended or hurt by that person, and the pain inside is limiting my ability to live life to the full.

But we don't have to carry that pain on the inside all our lives, healing is available through the act and process of forgiveness. Jesus taught us in The Lord's Prayer, 'forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us'. Here we see the flow of forgiveness, it needs to flow in and out like the daily tides. Through forgiveness we can off-load the pain and hurt that we feel in our hearts and begin to enjoy life again in a greater way.

Often when people hurt us, our first reaction or impulse is to hurt them back, but Jesus taught us 'to turn the other cheek', and not strike back. To many men, this may seem foolish or cowardly, or in the very least 'go against the grain' of what men generally do. But Jesus came to show us a better way, a higher way to live, the way that life is lived in heaven, God's way.

If we choose to follow God's way of living, we will get God's results. If we choose to merely do what comes naturally, then we will get those natural results too. It is not always easy to forgive, sometimes it is nearly impossible, but that is why we need to 'call upon God for help in time of need'.

Unforgiveness comes into our hearts in 'seed form' through an offence or hurt, and if we do not get rid of it through forgiveness, it grows stronger and stronger inside us, until it poisons the complete flow of life within us and leaves us bitter and twisted. Many good men have been crippled emotionally by being ignorant of the process of forgiveness, or by being unwilling to 'let go' the hurts and forgive.

As I have stated in the title of this teaching, forgiveness is often a process, not just a onetime act. This can be especially true if you have harboured resentment toward another person for some time, but the process works if you are prepared to stick with it and do it God's way.

The Process of Forgiveness

In Matthews Gospel, Jesus taught the heavenly way of dealing with the offences of this world. He said, ' Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.'

This heavenly process of forgiveness works, even in the most difficult situation or circumstance. Even though the first time you begin the process, it may seem like scaling Mt Everest, it will get easier day by day, if you continue in it. Within a short period of time, if you follow the steps daily, you will be free of the pain and offence on the inside, and your prayers for this person will release God to move afresh in their lives. When the process is finished you will no longer feel the pain when you think about them, and it may feel as if a weight has been lifted off you.

Step 1 Love Your Enemies

Step 2 Bless Those Who Curse You

Step 3 Do Good to Those Who Hate You

Step 4 Pray for Those Who Spitefully Use You and Persecute You

Dads' Call to Action:

Speak out daily ' I am a forgiving person, I forgive every person of every offence and hold no grudges against anyone. I also receive God's forgiveness daily and walk in His ways.'

(Matthew 5 v 43-48)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

TIP 11. LOVING WORDS

Throughout our nation many families suffer from the lack of hearing a certain word regularly within the home. It is a word that has incredible power, and an ability to break through the toughest barriers in human relationships. Raising children in our modern world is often challenging due to the many negative influences they constantly face outside the safety of the home. Bearing in mind the power and effect of these external influences upon a young life, it is doubly important that we as a parent understand and consistently implement the use of this word within the home.

In many families it is a word that is avoided at all costs, like a four letter (swear) word. Nevertheless, it is a word that is often felt within the family, but seldom verbalised. That four-letter word is 'Love'.

We live in a world that puts incredible forces upon family relationships, and often those forces are attempting to tear the family apart rather than bring it together. When there is conflict within a family, or members within it, one of the first things that seem to disappear, are expressions of love.

Often conflict in family relationships bring hurts or offences into people's hearts, and when people are hurt or offended, they 'put up walls in their heart' between themselves and the other person. These walls are a defensive mechanism to protect us from further emotional hurt, but they also become a stumbling block in the reconciliation of that relationship. The giving and receiving of forgiveness are then required to put that relationship back together.

Constantly speaking words of love between the members of the family is crucial in developing a buffer zone, which limits the damage of conflict situations. Saying 'I Love You' regularly to all the members of the family also helps to develop an atmosphere of acceptance and belonging, thereby strengthening the family.

On the flip side, the longer that 'I Love You' is not spoken within the family unit, the harder it becomes to say at all, and the gap between the hearts of the family members continues to widen. Families that don't verbalise words of love often can eventually fracture, because each individual member is not receiving the love they so desperately need to survive in the family. When the father expresses words of love regularly to the members of the family, there is usually a flow-on affect, where all the members of the family begin to follow suit.

Dads' Call to Action:

Try to verbalise your love for each family member regularly in a way that you feel comfortable with and which they can accept.

(Proverbs 15 v 23)

A man has joy by the answer of his mouth,

And a word spoken in due season, how good it is!

(James 3 v 2)

For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

TIP 12. LOVING DISCIPLINE

One of the most controversial subjects that any parenting course can broach is the subject of discipline. To discipline or not to discipline, is often the question asked. I believe that in this issue as in all others, we need to find our answers in the way that our 'Heavenly Father' deals with His children. Surely if He is the creator of the universe and all that is in it, then He must have some insight into this all-important subject. Any effective parenting plan or strategy must deal with the application of positive discipline within the family.

The scriptures in the Bible give us a valuable insight into the heart and mind of God, on this and many other subjects. Jesus showed conclusively that God is love and loves each one of us individually. Love is the basis that God uses, for all of 'His' dealings with man, and we would do well to learn from His example.

There are any number of 'academics' who seem to equate the word discipline as meaning child abuse or physical violence, but the truth behind the word discipline goes in a very different direction.

Discipline Dis`ci*pline, n. [F. discipline, L. disciplina, from discipulus. 1.

The treatment suited to a disciple or learner; education; development of the faculties by instruction and exercise; training, whether physical, mental, or moral.

Discipline aims at the removal of bad habits and the substitution of good ones, especially those of order, regularity, and obedience. --C. J. Smith.

Source: Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913)

Here we can clearly see that the aim of discipline is to teach or educate, not to abuse or hinder a person, but to assist them in finding the right way to live. This is clearly seen in the way that God (The Father) speaks to Adam (Son) in the Garden of Eden.

(Genesis 2 v 15-17)

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

There may have been hundreds of trees and bushes that Adam could have freely eaten from without any problems, a virtual feast for the taking. But God made sure that there was at least one tree in the garden that He could use to teach and educate Adam, through the discipline of obedience.

Discipline is required to develop obedience in the heart of man, and to teach him the right way to live. If man is left to his own devices and wilful desires, he will soon be overcome by the evil within the world and will suffer accordingly.

(Genesis 6 v 5-6)

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

As a father and the head of the home it is your responsibility, in consultation with your wife, to develop a framework of Godly discipline for the children. This framework should include checks and balances to ensure that it is fair, and needs to be administered lovingly, should be clearly articulated, and consistently enforced if it is to be of use in educating and teaching the children. You should also be aware that each child is different and may respond better to certain forms of discipline rather than others.

Checks and Balances are required in every level of leadership to ensure that those under your authority are treated fairly, and that you yourself remain teachable and don't become 'a law unto yourself'. One of the easiest ways to do this is to have regular open and frank discussions with your wife, about how each of you are performing in the 'discipline arena'. We as fathers, need to keep in mind that we must give an account of our stewardship when we stand before God one day.

It is also vitally important that the children themselves have a framework of appeal, so that they are assured of a fair hearing, or at the very least being able to give their side of the story. This is best done by establishing a procedure that is acceptable to the parents, where the child can 'state their case'. Something like 'Excuse me dad, but I didn't.....', seems to work well, as it releases the child from frustration without allowing them to show disrespect to the parent.

All discipline needs to be administered lovingly, and that means that we as men need to have a cool head when we do it. The adage of 'counting to ten' before saying anything is not without merit, although sometimes I think that counting to twenty or thirty is better.

Children should be disciplined privately, away from other siblings or strangers, to avoid compounding the problem through the child suffering embarrassment as well. The child needs to be informed and it needs to be clearly articulated as to why they are being disciplined (What was the infringement). After they have been disciplined, they should apologise for the infringement, and should then be hugged and reassured as to how much you love them, and that the goal of discipline is to help them have a happy life.

Discipline needs to be consistently enforced if we are to mould our children's character and strengthen them in preparation for the future. If we discipline them this week and then forget about it for a month, it will bring confusion and a blurring of the guidelines and framework we are trying to establish within the home. Without the element of consistency, disciplining your children will ultimately fail in achieving the results required.

Discipline within the home is always a challenge, but it will bear fruits in your children's lives that will strengthen them and set them up for success.

Dads' Call to Action:

Begin to develop a framework of discipline as early as possible within your children's lives. Administer it fairly and consistently over the years and you will reap the reward of children you can be proud of.

(Proverbs 22 v 6)

Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old, he will not depart from it.

(Hebrews 12 v 7-8)

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

TIP 13. GOAL SETTING

It is important to know the direction you want to go as a family. Having a plan of what you want to achieve over the next 20-30 years is crucial, a plan that includes many of the different areas of family life. As we develop our own individual parenting style, we should be careful to include family goals and the dreams we hold dear in our hearts, dreams that we are hoping will come true. Nobody packs a car to go on a holiday with their suitcases and surfboards, their roller skates and footballs, without first having made some concrete plans of where they want to go.

If we did that, we may be considered 'a little strange', yet many of us have no real plan where our family is going in life. Notice I said, 'no real plan' and not 'no real idea', as these two words mean totally different things.

We all have many ideas floating around in our heads, probably some good ideas and bad ones too, but an idea will only ever be an idea until it manifests in the natural world. Have you ever heard of an invention on the market and thought "Gee I had that idea years ago", "I wish I'd followed it through!" The difference was, that the inventor took the idea and made it real in the natural world, and because he did, he is now reaping the benefits of the idea.

Goal setting for your family is the first step toward developing a plan or strategy about where you want to be in the future. To take it beyond the idea stage and write it down on paper initiates the process of bringing it to pass. Note that I said 'process' and not one time 'event'. Goal setting is like laying down a railway track that you want your family to run on, it gives you an element of certainty and assurance that you will ultimately arrive at your destination, and not end up in Perth if you are aiming for Tasmania.

To begin goal setting for your family, it is important to get some input from every member of the family if possible, especially your wife. Discuss your hopes and dreams openly, and don't hold back or overly rationalise initially. Dream a big dream, believe for the very best for your family, in every area you can think of. The more detailed your life goals are the better, as in going through this process you will draw out from your heart the things that really matter to you.

Dads' Call to Action:

Write down your goals for every area of your life, physical (health), financial, relational (marriage/family), assets you want to acquire, holidays you want to go on, spiritual positioning with God, etc. Also do a simplified version that you can put up in a prominent position, where it will catch your eye regularly. Pray over your goals daily and release your faith that God will help you bring them to pass. Begin to plan a step by step process of seeing your dreams become a reality. After you are doing all these steps, stand back and watch what will happen.

(Habakkuk 2 v 2)

Then the Lord answered me and said:

"Write the vision

And make it plain on tablets,

That he may run who reads it."

TIP 14. BEING AN EXAMPLE

Many men find it sobering and challenging when they realise that as parents, we are the greatest role models that our children follow in life. One of the most confronting things for some dads is the fact that our own behaviour is on show to our children 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The adage 'Do what I say, don't do what I do', just doesn't cut it anymore.

Children listen to what their parents say initially, but don't absorb it if they see the parents doing the opposite of what has been stated. This sends confusing messages to the children and erodes parental credibility.

We can't teach the children not to swear, if we constantly swear in their presence. We can't teach them not to smoke, if we are going through a packet of cigarettes a day. We can't teach them not to drink alcohol if they constantly see us with a beer in our hand. Whatever we want them to be, we must be.

The truth of the matter is that in many instances our children will do what we do, rather than what we say.

Dads' Call to Action:

Take a long hard look at yourself and ask yourself if you would be happy for your kids to turn out the same. If you see areas in your life that you don't want in their lives, begin to face them and change them for your kids' sake.

(Philippians 3 v 17)

Brethren join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

(1 Timothy 4 v 12)

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

TIP 15. INDIVIDUAL TIME

It is important to realise that as we are raising children each of your children are unique, with individual needs and desires. Most of the time a father must deal with issues as a family, using the broad-brush approach, and the decisions made effect the whole family. However, there are times when each child needs your attention solely, and alone. Whether we are parenting boys or parenting girls we need to understand that each of our children looks to us as their father for leadership, encouragement and security.

Time spent alone with a loving father can become some of the most enduring memories a child can have. They can also be a wonderful opportunity to impart wisdom and understanding to the child at a deeper and more personal level.

One of these times can be at bed time for the children, as you as the father take a few minutes with each child tucking them in, telling them stories, praying with them or merely discussing the day's events with them. Having 'Dad' there when they are about to go to sleep also adds an extra dimension of security in a young child's heart.

Some fathers also take their children out 'individually' to sports events or breakfast at McDonald's etc, just to be able to show the child that they are important as an individual and not 'just another member' of the family. These simple actions can really help to boost a child's self-esteem or sense of self-worth.

Dads' Call to Action:

Set aside a little time each day for each of your children individually and try to take them somewhere special from time to time.

(Proverbs 1 v 8-9)

My son, hear the instruction of your father,
And do not forsake the law of your mother;
For they will be a graceful ornament on your head,
And chains about your neck.

TIP 16. TELEVISION VIEWING

Effective parenting plans should include a strategy that protects young minds from inappropriate television programming. Many parents express concerns about the content that is being put on TV these days. It is paramount that we as protectors of their innocence, take the time and effort to ensure that our children are not being exposed to unsuitable shows. Whether it is suggestive ads for 'adult' programs later that night or any of the many programs displaying attitudes and behaviour that would undermine your own efforts to guide your children, we need to be vigilant and set clear guidelines for TV viewing.

These guidelines should include the amount of time the children watch TV, as well as the content viewed. To ensure that our children continue to grow up in a healthy mental state, we need to protect them from many of the events that are current in the news. Whether it be graphic depictions of war or murder, or any of the many other unsavoury topics that we see daily on the news, we as parents need to shield young minds.

The trouble with TV is that once the image has been flashed upon the screen, it is housed within the child's memory. If the image is brutal or shocking then that image will stay with that child throughout life, and depending upon the individual child's personality, may have an adverse effect upon their lives. The result of these images being imprinted upon young minds can only be guessed at, but without doubt they incite fear and worry in many children.

There is a worrying trend growing across our nation, where TV's are being placed within children's bedrooms. This unfortunately often leads to unrestricted viewing, both in content and time. Children initially do not have the experience or wisdom to decide for themselves what they should or should not watch on TV, it must have been taught them by their parents. If most kids had the option between eating chocolate or vegetables, nearly all would take the chocolate, but we know that eating too much chocolate may attract health problems. In the same way our children have no way of knowing what ill effects they may experience by watching the wrong shows on TV.

Watching TV in the morning before going to school is another unhealthy trend that is limiting our children's intellectual growth. Our children need to face each new day in the best possible mind set, and not carrying around mental baggage from the shows they've been watching.

Dads' Call to Action:

Set some clear guidelines about both the times and the content that your children can watch on TV. Protect young minds from disturbing images on the news.

(Matthew 6 v 22-23)

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

TIP 17. CHILDREN'S SLEEP

A simple but important way to benefit your children is to always ensure that they get a good night's sleep. Whether you are currently raising a baby, a young child, or a teenager a good night's sleep is as important as putting oil in the motor of your car, without it there's going to be problems. A child needs much more sleep than an adult, because their bodies are growing all the time.

Most of a child's growth is done during the sleeping hours, when many other bodily functions are shut down. This is especially true during 'growth spurts', and in the teenage years, when there are dramatic changes in a child's body. It is our job to provide the best conditions possible to ensure our child's growth is not hindered in any way.

A good night's sleep is also vital if the children are to function properly at school. As fathers we have probably all experienced a few sleepless nights, especially when we first bring the baby home. If we can recall how we may have struggled with a lack of sleep, and how our functions were impaired, then we have a glimpse into the need for a good night's sleep.

A good night's sleep can be dependent upon several factors, not all of which we are in control. But we can attempt to minimise the detrimental elements involved by setting some basic ground rules. Most children need a minimum of 10 hours sleep a night to be able to function fully, with a clear head and a revitalised body. If your child is normally an early riser, then you need to ensure that they are in bed at an appropriate time to ensure they get the sleep they need.

Some of the other factors involved can be noise factors within the home. We need to create an environment conducive to the children going to sleep easily. This may include ensuring that noise levels of TV's or stereos are low enough not to hinder the children 'dropping off'. We should also ensure that they are either warm enough or cool enough for the conditions present, and that the room in which they sleep is well ventilated.

Spending time with the children whilst 'tucking them in' is another way to ensure that they have a peaceful mindset before going to sleep. Reading to them, praying with them or singing to them can have a very settling influence upon a young mind.

Dads' Call to Action:

Develop a system within the home to ensure that the children get a good night's sleep.

(Proverbs 3 v 24)

When you lie down, you will not be afraid;

Yes, you will lie down, and your sleep will be sweet.

Tip 18. A BALANCED DIET

There has been plenty said in the media and nutritionists and health professionals are constantly telling us that we need to have a balanced diet. We've probably all seen the 'food pyramid', which tells us which foods we should eat and in what proportions. There are also many parenting magazines and websites that address these important issues. These tools are a helpful guideline for fathers, to ensure that what our children are eating is good for them, and for their future health.

With childhood obesity at record levels, it is important that we have at least a basic understanding of the issues involved in having a balanced diet. As a nation, over the last 20 years or so, there has been an incredible change in the way we eat.

What used to be prepared in the kitchen at home, is now more and more often purchased from a 'take away', and this opens several questions such as "what is in this food?"

As a rule, if your children eat plenty of breads and grains, along with fruit and vegetables daily, some dairy products and proteins (meats) with a few oils or sweets occasionally things should be fine. But this is only a rough guide, and you may need to seek professional help for specific answers to individual problems.

If I as a father notice that my children are getting 'a little overweight', it may be a good idea to pursue these issues further and find out if everything is 'in balance'.

We now know that diet alone is not the answer to a healthy body, but that it must be combined with regular exercise. If my children are active most the time and not sedentary in front of the TV etc., then they will tend to burn off a great percentage of what they eat. But if they are eating too many chocolates and not exercising enough, they may be heading toward a health crisis in later life.

Our own example is, as always, one of the greatest ways we can teach our children how to live. If we eat well and exercise often, they will be far more likely to do the same. Our children will often 'follow in our footsteps', and that can be either for good or bad. It is therefore important that we as fathers lead them 'in the way they should go'.

Dads' Call to Action:

Try to ensure that your children are eating a balanced diet. Keep an eye on your children's weight and respond accordingly.

(Proverbs 22 v 6)

Train up a child in the way he should go,

And when he is old, he will not depart from it.

TIP 19. PERSONAL HYGIENE

I believe it is important that we should not just assume that every 'dad to be' or 'first time father' already has all the skills required to become a great dad. It is for this very reason that I have included several areas of parenting that although deemed basic by many, are still important enough for inclusion in these teachings. It has been said that "cleanliness is next to Godliness" and although I'm not too sure of the theological correctness of that statement, I would certainly agree that cleanliness is an important issue.

Some of the major diseases of the 'middle ages' were able to be eradicated by simply teaching people to keep themselves clean, and to wash their clothing as well as eating and cooking utensils. By doing these simple tasks they were able to avoid cross contamination which was a leading cause of sickness in those days. In modern times we still need to be vigilant in these basic procedures if we are to avoid endangering our health and the health of our children.

Personal hygiene, or more specifically the lack of it, is often perceived as a 'social stigma' in our society. Nobody wants to sit next to the kid that 'smells bad' in the classroom, and this can have a devastating effect upon a child's self-confidence.

The good news is that it can easily be avoided and corrected if we follow a few basic procedures. It is important that our children have a bath or shower each day, as this will avoid a build-up of 'body odour' and ensure that they feel fresh and ready for the day's challenges. I would also recommend that children use a child friendly deodorant as they grow, and body odour becomes more of a problem.

It is especially important to train your children to brush their teeth well, at least twice a day after eating, as this can limit the development of cavities and offset gum disease that may develop later in life. Also, by brushing their teeth well they will be limiting the development of the germs that cause 'bad breath', and this we know is another of the 'social stigma's' we need to avoid in our child's life. By doing these simple steps we can develop a good habit in our child that will last a lifetime and help them to feel good about themselves.

Dads' Call to Action:

Ensure that your children have a daily program of personal hygiene.

(Proverbs 22 v 6)

Train up a child in the way he should go,

And when he is old, he will not depart from it.

TIP 20. IDENTIFYING TALENTS

I firmly believe that when we are placed in this world, we arrive with both a mission in life and gifting or abilities to achieve that mission. For many these gifts or abilities are natural areas that we may excel in, or areas that we show great potential in, beyond the norm. As a parent we should be prepared to identify and encourage our child in areas that they show interest and talent in.

I also believe that finding your area of gifting often plays a large part in ultimately finding fulfilment in life. Considering this, it is important that we as fathers be on the lookout for areas of gifting in our child's life. If we can identify these abilities early in life, we can begin to encourage the child and open opportunities for them to grow in their area of gifting.

Identifying your child's area of gifting can be as easy as realising that your son likes to pull things apart and try to put them back together again or finding them constantly expressing interest in all the bugs they find in the yard.

It could be a desire to help do the cooking in the kitchen from an early age or being a stand out player in an area of sport. It could be your daughter showing an interest in making clothes for dollies, or constantly spending time doing her friend's hair. All these situations can be clues along the way to finding their area of gifting.

I think that as a father one of my greatest desires is to see my children live a happy and fulfilled life. It is a sad reality but true, that many people go through life hating their job, but never realise that there may be a viable alternative. I think that if we as fathers can help our children to find their own area of gifting, or even to encourage to them to keep looking for it until they do, we will be helping them move a long way toward finding fulfilment in life.

Now it is also important to realise that many people do not even identify their area of gifting until later in life, so we should not put any pressure on our children to find it. These things seem to work themselves out in the right season of life for each person, but if we can encourage our children that they have a gift, they will stay focused until they find it.

Dads' Call to Action:

Keep a look out for signs of a talented area within your children and encourage them and open up opportunities for them to pursue it.

(Proverbs 18 v 16)

A man's gift makes room for him,
And brings him before great men.

TIP 21. EATING TOGETHER AS A FAMILY

The simple act of having a meal together can be a strategic opportunity for families to connect at a deeper or more meaningful level. In our busy 21st Century lives it is often difficult for some families to find the time to share a meal together with all the members of the family present. Often the parents are getting home late from work or the children are at football practice or dancing rehearsal etc. many nights of the week.

One of the best parenting tips I can give to 'new dads' or 'dads to be' is to raise your children in a home that has an abundance of love and fun. One of the simplest yet most effective ways to achieve this is around the dinner table.

It is therefore important that you schedule in a time when everybody will be available to eat together as a family. These times can become treasured memories in a child's life, as they are times when we have an opportunity to 'connect' both individually and as a family.

When children feel that they are an important and valued member of a family, they don't need to look outside the family unit so much to 'belong'. This can help to avoid your children forming relationships outside the family that may be unhealthy or detrimental long term. Many young people these days look to their 'peers' or even local street gangs for a sense of 'belonging', often because they are not receiving the love and attention they need at home. This can be a step toward a life of drug abuse and crime if the real problem is not recognised and addressed.

Children like adults, will always have a need and a desire to feel loved and appreciated, this does not diminish as they grow older, but often submerges below the radar as they 'learn' how to put on a 'front' or 'facade'. Open and honest communication is required to offset the chances of these 'facades' or 'walls' going up between individual members or entire family units.

Having a meal together regularly is an opportunity to 'communicate', rather than just a time to feed ourselves. The aim should be 'to enjoy each other's company' and 'see how things are going' with each child. As the father you should attempt to ensure that everyone gets a chance to talk or express an opinion on any topics of discussion throughout the meal.

You can also help to 'steer' the conversations into areas that are positive while not 'stifling' the discussion. By getting your children to talk and express their opinions, you can also identify any problem areas that may arise and deal with these privately later.

Dads' Call to Action:

Schedule a regular time for your whole family to come together and share a meal. This should be at least once a week if possible, and make sure that the TV and stereo are off to avoid distractions. Remember the aim is to enjoy each other's company, so keep it fun.

(Acts 20 v 7)

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight

TIP 22. SPORT INVOLVEMENT

Kids sports are a wonderful way that we as a parent can ensure the ongoing health and happiness of our children. I remember growing up, playing sport every weekend, training a couple of times during the week, standard life for the young males of our generation. Sport kept me fit and strong, and probably just as important, it kept me involved in something. In our nation the most popular kids sport for boys are soccer (which is often referred to as football) and for girls it is the sport of netball.

Childhood Obesity is rampant in our society, and unless we take some strategic steps forward to face the issue head on, as a society we may find ourselves outliving our children. To counteract this growing trend, governments are throwing truckloads of money at the issue, attempting to initiate a culture of sport back in our schools again. I applaud these endeavours by our government, as health issues have far reaching ramifications, especially in children.

One of the ingredients required to establish a lifestyle of sport/healthy activity is direct parental involvement in the sport/activity. On one level the school is pushing/encouraging the children to participate in sports, and the children will hopefully begin to enjoy the exercise and competition of sport, but if there is no re-enforcement at home, especially from the child's father, it is very possible that sport/healthy activity will never become a lifestyle.

Developing a lifestyle of healthy activity/sport will hold your children in good stead for many years to come and will probably affect the way your grandchildren grow up as well. For this reason, it is vital that fathers show an interest in their child's sport/activity, to help re-enforce the validity of the issue in the child's mind. In a child's mind, 'If it's not important to Dad, it's obviously not that important'.

In my childhood I played football for many years, every weekend out there having a go, doing my best, keeping healthy. But one thing I always knew, that when my Dad made it to the game, I was going to take it up a notch and play even better. Both sons and daughters are always seeking approval from their fathers, it's in their nature, and this is one of our greatest opportunities as fathers to help steer them in the right direction in life. If we don't give them the approval they are looking for, they will begin to seek it from peers and other adults, that may not have the child's best in mind.

Dads' Call to Action:

Talk to your children regularly about their sport/activity. Show an interest in how they/the team is going. If you have skills in the area/sport teach the child, the skills in the backyard or park. Get along to the game if you can and encourage them from the sideline. Consider taking up a manager/coaching role in your child's sport for a time.

(Proverbs 22 v 6)

Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old, he will not depart from it.

TIP 23. HOMEWORK HELP

Positive parenting is often accomplished in family life through the care and concern we show toward the challenges that our children are facing. When fathers show an interest in their children's schoolwork, and help them sometimes with their homework, it sends a signal to the child that this area is one of importance. This will help to keep the child motivated at school, and focused on achieving their best, because they know that their 'Dad is interested'.

Showing an interest in how they are going in their individual school subjects, whether it's Maths, English or Science can be as easy as asking over a meal and encouraging them when they have showed an improvement. It may also uncover areas that they are currently struggling with in school and can give rise to an opportunity to discuss this with a teacher, or to seek out some extra tutoring if possible.

Many potential school problems can be avoided when fathers express and maintain interest in their child's schoolwork from an early age. This can also assist in the development of an open dialogue around the subject of schoolwork. This often becomes increasingly important as your child graduates into high school and workloads and academic stresses increase.

It is not possible to accurately measure the power of a kind or encouraging word, to a child or young person, but ask yourself this question "Can you remember something someone you respect said to you when you were a child?". Showing interest in your child's schooling can sometimes make a tremendous difference in a young life and reap benefits for many generations to come.

Dads' Call to Action:

Show an interest regularly in the kid's schoolwork and assist them in any way you can.

(Deuteronomy 6 v 6-7)

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

TIP 24. TEACHING BIBLE STORIES

As a teaching site based on helping to develop loving Christian families, it would be remiss of me to leave out this all-important subject. It has been said that as a nation we have the highest youth suicide rate in the world, and many believe that our young people are dying for a lack of real hope in their lives. When previous generations chose to reject the wisdom and safety found in God's Word, they robbed our generation of hope and vision, and these vital elements can only be restored by a return to a respect and honour for God's Word, the Bible.

Now I am not writing about instilling false hope or believing in a powerless God, for my personal experience has shown God to be both willing and able to do 'all things'. When Jesus Christ comes into our hearts by faith, and we find forgiveness before the throne of God, everything in our life changes. A living faith is so empowering that so many people say, 'Why didn't I do this years ago?'

The stories contained in the Holy Bible are written about real people like you and me, who had life changing experiences with God. Some were farmers, some businessmen, some fishermen, some people worked for others, but one thing that they all had in common was that they had an appointment with 'The Living God'.

God calls all mankind to come to Him and to know Him personally, through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. By paying the price for 'our' sins Jesus became the door into heaven for all who believe. Now we, like all those people in the Bible can know what it is like to 'walk with God'.

Reading the bible stories to your children can help to sow the seeds of a living faith in their hearts, and they can grow to know what it is like to 'walk with God' too. Of course, we ourselves may yet need to take that leap of faith and believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour. I would encourage you to begin by reading the Gospel of John in the new testament, and my prayer is that you would find 'your own faith come alive in your heart'.

You may then consider joining with other believers in a local church or home group to assist you to grow in your faith and understanding of the Bible verses.

Dads' Call to Action:

Take the time to dust off the family bible and read to your children. Your actions may well contribute to them finding the joy and hope of eternity in their own hearts.

(Luke 18 v 15-16)

Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God."

TIP 25. DON'T SHOW FAVOURITISM

When our wife's pregnancy has progressed to childbirth, we as the father also graduate from a 'dad to be' and finally become a father. When this happens in our life, focus is substantially altered and now much of our time and energy is spent on this wonderful new addition to our family. For a while at least your first-born child is the centre of attention, and usually gets showered with gifts and plenty of play time with dad etc.

Becoming a father is a wonderful life changing experience for many dads, and when they hold their beautiful son or daughter for the first time many men are so deeply moved, that tears flow in joy. That little person then becomes the centre of their world at least until the second little bundle of joy arrives.

Suddenly there needs to be another shift in our focus, and we have now become a father of two are required to adopt a new perspective to ensure that everyone's needs are being met with fairness and equality. It is in these times especially, that 'being forewarned is being forearmed', and a small initial adjustment can help avoid major problems later in life.

It is easy to fall into the trap of showing favouritism to one child or another, even without thinking about it. As fathers we may gravitate or connect with one child more than another, especially if we have a similar temperament to the child. It is important to be aware of this possibility so that we can recognise it and take steps to avoid the negative results that it can bring into the family.

Each child is an individual, uniquely designed by the hand of God, all having their own needs that they look to you as the father, to fulfil. They all have their own strengths and weaknesses, and some are very astute at 'wrapping their dads around their little fingers' if given the chance.

We may not think that the children notice if we spend more time with this child rather than that one, but they do. What may start as a little prickle in your relationship may end up becoming a wedge between you that it is not always easy to overcome. If a child thinks that dad is spending more time with 'them' rather than 'me', they can begin to feel 'left out' or 'unwanted', and this can lead to walls of resentment being built up.

I realise that there are some 'special needs' children that will require a lot more time than their siblings, and that it is impossible to avoid this. In this situation it is important to spend time discussing the situation with the child/children who are missing out and asking for their help and understanding.

Often all it takes is setting aside specific time to 'connect' with each child and make them feel special too. Each of your children need regular specific time when 'they' are the sole centre of your attention, a time when they can feel loved and accepted by 'dad'.

Dads' Call to Action:

Be aware of the possibility that you may gravitate easier toward one child over another. Recognise it early and ensure that you 'connect' with each child on a regular basis.

(Luke 15 v 11-12)

Then He said: 'A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me." So, he divided to them his livelihood.

TIP 26. HUGS AND KISSES

In our nation there are many dads who have grown up without an affectionate father themselves, and so often find it difficult to grasp the concept of showing affection to their own children. Although this is an unfortunate situation, it is still able to be overcome and becomes an opportunity to 'turn our lemons into lemonade'.

For children that have grown up in a house where affection is readily shown, it's no big deal, it's normal and they have never known anything else. They have however reaped a huge harvest emotionally in comparison to those who lacked this most important family interaction. Whether we are raising boys or raising girls we need for them to feel loved and treasured within our family.

Whatever standard we set in the home becomes routine and expected, and our children just accept that this is 'the way family is done' everywhere. It often comes as a shock later in life when your kids realise that some children grow up without ever experiencing the loving affection that they themselves have grown accustomed to.

Children instinctively understand that they need the loving affection of both their parents to grow strong and secure emotionally. An outward display of caring and loving emotion tells the child in a practical way that they are accepted in this family and helps them to have a strong foundation in life on which to build a future.

All human beings require the touch of another to impart acceptance and hope into our hearts. Giving the children lots of hugs and kisses regularly sets the standard in the family and helps build the emotional strength they need to prosper in life.

Dads' Call to Action:

Make a point of giving your children a hug and kiss at least once each day.

(Mark 10 v 16)

And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

TIP 27. GIRLS AND CUDDLES

In the same way that boys need to wrestle or have physical contests with their dads to establish and strengthen their identity as males, so girls need to have a different kind of contact to assist in the development of their self-image as a female. Because of the vastly different emotional make-up between boys and girls we need to develop a parenting plan that acknowledges this. The understanding required in raising boys and raising girls is very different, although their basic need is to have the touch and acceptance of their father.

Girls and young woman often look at their dads as 'heroes' and 'knights in shining armour', as protectors and leaders in the home. It is primarily the relationship with their father that will form the basis of their self-image as a woman and what they can expect in life.

When a father treats his daughter well and tells her often that she is 'beautiful' and 'clever' and 'a princess' she will accept his assessment of her as truth and begin to act and live out of that picture. She will become 'beautiful' and 'clever' and 'a princess' because that will be the picture, she has of herself on the inside, her self-image. As she grows in life she will automatically gravitate toward relationships where she is treated well and respected by men, because that was how her dad treated her.

However, if a father treats his daughter badly and puts her down or abuses her in any way, it will shape her perception of the world in general, and as she grows up, she will gravitate toward relationships where she is treated badly or abused. This is often because bad treatment or abuse is what she feels she deserves in life, because that was the way her dad treated her.

How vitally important then is it for us as fathers to treat our daughters as our own 'beautiful princesses' and to love and honour them in such a way as to shape their life for success and not failure.

Girls need to be cuddled and tickled by their dads often as it strengthens their sense of self-worth immensely and ensures that they feel accepted within the family. She may think "Dad is the head of the home, and if he feels I am worthy of this attention, then I must be a worthwhile person too!"

Dads' Call to Action:

Spend quality time with your daughter, give her cuddles and tickles and kisses and let her know often that she is your 'beautiful little princess'.

(Proverbs 23 v 7)

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

TIP 28. WRESTLING WITH BOYS

Raising boys is different from raising girls and requires a different parenting plan. Now this is a broad generalisation and may not apply to every family in the world, but as a rule of thumb is applicable in most cases. 'Boys need to wrestle with their fathers'. In saying 'wrestle' I mean that boys need to have physical contests with their fathers, whether it be wrestling on the bed or playing football in the backyard etc.

These times together are important to help reinforce the boys understanding of his own 'masculinity' and strength as well as being a lot of fun. "Show me your muscles big guy!" and "Let's see if you can push dad off the bed!" are a wonderful opportunity for fathers and sons to bond. Of course, if your sons are 18 years old and bigger and stronger than you are, this may be a short contest with slightly embarrassing results.

With so much 'politically correct' and 'non-discriminatory' subject matter around these days, it is far too easy for the basic home truths of life to get blurred in the confusion. Boys are meant to grow up, marry a wife and have children of their own. This has been the way of life from the creation, and we can be confident that the way God chose for us is the correct one.

Spending time doing 'manly' things with your sons occasionally goes a long way toward avoiding any confusion in this area, and helps sons identify with their father's role in the family. This is important as they are the future leaders of their own homes.

Dads' Call to Action:

Have a regular wrestle with your sons or play a game of football in the backyard together. This will help strengthen their identity and pride in being a male.

(Genesis 25 v 27-28)

So, the boys grew. And Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

TIP 29. DADS' NETWORKS

For many men there are times while raising their children, that their role as a father can be a very lonely existence, especially if they don't have a strong relationship with their own father or family. It is often of great benefit just to be able to have someone to discuss parenting issues with and often it can help relieve some of the stress that comes with raising a family.

For this reason, I would encourage you to seek to become part of a local men's group or parent group within your area. Being able to spend time with likeminded men who are also raising children can be incredibly encouraging. It's important to realise that as parents we all go through many similar challenges, and it is good to know that we are not the only one needing some parenting insights.

A local dad's network or men's group can be very rewarding if you are able to find men who are going in the same general direction as you and wanting to be the best dad's they can be in life. Although initially it can be a little intimidating for men to open and discuss the issues they may be facing, I have found that once the element of trust is established within the group all can benefit from the experience.

In most successful dads groups this trust is established by a strong element of acceptance within the group, and a realisation that the members will probably have differing opinions on several subjects. I believe that it is important to find men that you can relate to or a group that you can feel part of, as it is often only these types of groups that can really benefit you in your role as a father.

Another element of many successful dads' groups is the opportunity for each person to be able to express an opinion, as most dads learn best through an open exchange of ideas. Often these groups can also benefit by getting together at social functions or picnics with their families, and to just relax and enjoy each other's company.

Dads' Call to Action:

Seek to become part of a local dad's group of likeminded men, as the experience can be very rewarding for you and your family.

(2 Timothy 2 v 2)

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

TIP 30. FAMILY HERITAGE

As a family unit it is important that you make your mark in our society and leave something behind that the generations to come can remember you by. It doesn't have to be the cure for cancer or an amazing invention, but it does need to be uniquely and distinctly yours as a family. You can do this by developing a family heritage, things that your family loves to do that can become a family tradition.

her-i-tage n.

1. Property that is or can be inherited; an inheritance.
2. Something that is passed down from preceding generations; a tradition.
3. The status acquired by a person through birth; a birthright: a heritage of affluence and social position

It could be something as simple as a yearly holiday at the beach, or a camping trip to the bush at Easter. It could be being involved in a charity program every year or getting together with the extended family at Christmas. It may be as straightforward as going to the football regularly and to the grand final every year. Whatever it is, it needs to be something that your family enjoys and identifies with, a family tradition that is worthwhile continuing for many years to come.

For many a family heritage has just 'seemed to develop' through identifying the areas of interest within the family and continuing to pursue them over a long period of time. A family heritage is an 'inheritance or tradition' that has the imprint of your family upon it, it is uniquely yours, and something your family can be proud of and hopefully continue, if it stays relevant.

The beauty of a family heritage is that it is always growing and developing, as different things are added throughout the years. It does not have to be formal or regimented, but should remain fluid and adaptable, this will give it a greater chance of surviving through generational changes.

The main thought behind having or developing a family heritage is having something that your children can identify with, that gives them a sense of belonging. Something that they will want to pass on to their children, a family tradition that is worth keeping.

Dads' Call to Action:

Identify the things that you love to do as a family and make them a part of a developing family heritage.

(1 Corinthians 11:2)

Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.

TIP 31. SIBLING AFFECTION

In many families across our country a civil war can develop between siblings over the slightest provocation, and it brings with it disruption to the entire household. As we may already know, sibling rivalry has been well documented previously and there are several books by parenting experts that deal expressly with the issue and propose ways to counteract what can be a devastating habit within the ranks of our children. As a father it is important to have a parenting plan that deals with this major subject.

I have always believed it's easier to build a fence at the top of the hill, rather than have an ambulance waiting at the bottom of the hill. As a wise man once said, 'Prevention is always better than cure'. If we can identify ways to stop our children's relationship dissolving into a state that is susceptible to sibling rivalry, we will have gone a long way to avoiding our own civil war.

We need to realise that siblings having arguments among themselves is part of growing up and learning to be flexible sometimes and assertive at others. This is part of a process that helps shape how we see ourselves, our self-image, and is a normal part of life. The problem comes when resentments can build up between siblings, and last month's issues carry over into this month's argument.

To avoid the building up of resentments between your siblings there should be a process of dealing with the issues that arise, but also of dealing with the emotional damage that is often done when things are said in the heat of the moment during an argument. Long after the issue is forgotten, the hurtful words spoken by siblings can still have a damaging affect in the heart of a child.

Teaching your children to express their love for each other, is like most things in parenting, easier to do the earlier you start. Having your children say 'I love you' to their siblings on a regular basis is like preventative maintenance on a car, it stops it breaking down long term. Those few little words can break down the walls that build up between siblings, to heal old wounds, and to encourage new growth in the relationship.

It is probably easier to get a girl to express her love verbally than a boy, due to the emotional make up of females, but boys are well able to say it even if it is often in their 'own way'. The main thing is that they do express their love for each other and don't fall into the habit of not saying what they really feel.

There is tremendous power released within a family when our ever-present love for each other is verbalised, and as a father this should be a top priority. During my years as a pastor I had to perform numerous funerals and dealt with many families who expressed regret that they had failed to verbalise their love for each other regularly, and now at the funeral it was too late to say what they always felt inside.

Life is far too short to miss out on the opportunities that come our way to express our love for our families. By teaching our children this simple process we can bring peace into our homes and help them to avoid terrible regret later in life.

Dads' Call to Action:

Teach your children to express their love for each other regularly. Lead them by your own example.

(1 John 4 v 7)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

TIP 32. APPRECIATING NATURE

There is little doubt that we live on a beautiful planet, that has been strategically positioned within our solar system to optimise the best possible lifestyle for its inhabitants. If we were one planet closer to the sun, we would all fry, one planet further away and we would be ice cubes. One of the more enjoyable outings that a family can experience is a trip into nature and the great outdoors!

The more we explore the wonderful creation we live in, the greater we can see the hand and wisdom of God. I have had the opportunity to live in some of the most beautiful areas of our nation, each with its own individual characteristics and uniqueness, and have seen 'our Father's' artistic touch everywhere. Truly it is in nature that God has shown off His amazing creativity and faithfulness.

God's faithfulness is seen in the things that He has made, they are an ever-present testimony declaring His splendour. It is possible however for us to drive right past the beautiful things in nature in the busyness of our day to day living. In the rush to 'make a living' we can forget to 'live' and enjoy the ride.

There are times in life when the circumstances around us may seem very difficult, and it is 'hard to see light at the end of the tunnel'. It is at these times especially, that we need to take the time to appreciate and connect with all the beautiful things that surround us daily.

Have you stopped the rush long enough to listen to the birds singing, or sat quietly and watched the clouds floating through the sky? Have you rested on the beach and watched the waves roll in, or been amazed at the multitudes of stars in the night sky? Have you looked at the intricacy that is held within a single flower petal, or tried to guess how many pores there are in the palm of your hand?

If we as fathers can learn to appreciate the beauty of the creation around us and understand the faithfulness of God that is revealed in it, then we can pass on an excellent gift to our children.

Dads' Call to Action:

Take the time to 'smell the roses' with your children, impart to them your love for nature and teach them how it reveals the faithfulness of God.

(Matthew 6 v 28-30)

"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

TIP 33. RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTIONS

One of the most disturbing signs in our society at present is the widespread lack of accepting personal responsibility for our actions. Time and time again we see people failing to take responsibility for their own often misguided acts. This has even gone into the areas of the ridiculous when criminals sue the people they are robbing because they broke a leg while jumping out the window carrying a plasma TV.

It is always 'someone else's fault' or because 'I was neglected as a child' when my parents didn't give me everything I ever wanted. Now I am not saying that there are not valid cases of child neglect, unfortunately that is also a reality in our nation, but when people constantly 'shift the blame' to someone else it shows a lack of understanding of personal responsibility. As a dad we need to select a parenting style that helps prepare our children for life in the 'real world', an understanding of accepting personal responsibility is a great step toward this goal.

As a father it is our responsibility to teach our children right from wrong, and to show them clearly the law of cause and effect. The law of cause and effect states simply that there are consequences for every action in life. If our children faithfully do the chores they are assigned, the consequences of those actions will be beneficial to them, and they will be rewarded. But if they do wrong then it is also our responsibility to ensure that they realise the consequences of those actions too.

If you teach your children not to tell lies and then find out that they have lied to someone, it is your responsibility to ensure that they face up to and accept the consequences for those actions. The embarrassment that they may have to face for 'owning up' to telling a lie as a child will be far less tragic than a life that becomes set upon lies and deception. Telling lies can easily become a habit and this may easily ensue if the problem is not solved quickly.

I would also encourage you to go with the child and support them as they confess to the lie before the person they lied to and apologise for it. I believe we as fathers need to be there to support them and encourage them especially when they are learning these important lessons in life. It is important to stand with your child in this difficult time and if need be to share in the penalties that may ensue.

Sometimes when a child sees the effect of their actions upon their parents it can have a deeply beneficial impact upon a young life. This is a wonderful time and opportunity to bond closer to your child and let them know how proud you are of them when they face up to the wrong, they have done. This is a character-building moment in the child's life, and it is important for us to remember that we too as children may also have been guilty of telling a lie.

Dads' Call to Action:

Don't shy away from facing and dealing with the flaws in your children's character that you find, as they are a wonderful opportunity to teach and bond with your child.

(Luke 12 v 2-3)

For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known.
Therefore, whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

(Proverbs 22 v 1)

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
Loving favour rather than silver and gold.

TIP 34. PRAYING FOR YOUR CHILD

Without doubt one of the most misunderstood concepts for many men is how to pray. When I speak to many men about prayer it often seems as if I am talking in a foreign language, as I see the blank response on their faces. I fully realise that unless you have been brought up with prayer that it can seem to be a strange and almost spooky thing to do. However, prayer, once the habit is birthed in your heart, is a magnificent experience and one that we as men who are raising children in this world need to acquire.

Prayer to God is as simple as communicating to someone whom you love and trust. For those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, prayer is a daily adventure. Jesus taught us many times in the Bible to pray, and His example is our shining light. Prayer is an ever-deepening ability to communicate with God our creator on an intimate and life changing level.

Prayer can be as simple as a cry from your heart saying, 'Jesus help me!', or as powerful as a life of intercession before the throne of God. Wherever you are at in your prayer life, it is vital that we as fathers pray for our children. There are forces of good (God's side) and forces of evil in this world, and both sides will attempt to influence your child's life and their eternity.

The prayers of a father can help tip the scales in the favour of God's influence governing over your child's life rather than evil. God has given the authority over this world to man, and because He respects our free will, God will usually not interfere unless He is asked to. Prayer is asking for God's help and giving Him permission to move in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones.

Prayer can dramatically change the atmosphere around our home and our child's life, as God's Holy Spirit is released to rule over our lives. In place of fear and torment there will be peace, in place of trouble and strife there will be unity and forgiveness in the home. The more you welcome the person of the Holy Spirit into your home the better things will be.

Talk to Him, He is a friend and a comforter, He is a guide and a protector, and He is given to believers as a wonderful gift from heaven. Ask for His wisdom to raise your children, ask for His angels to surround them daily, and for divine health and mercy to be theirs all the days of their lives. Ask that He would send them good friends and great opportunities in life, and that He would draw them closer to Himself daily.

Prayer is like the breaking of a dam wall, it starts with the smallest crack and through persistence even the mightiest structures come tumbling down.

Dads' Call to Action:

Spend time on your knees daily asking for God's help and His blessing and protection over your marriage and your children.

(Numbers 6 v 22-27)

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, "This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

"The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine upon you,

And be gracious to you;

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,

And give you peace."

"So, they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

TIP 35. DEVELOPING RESPONSIBILITY

One of the ultimate aims of 'parenting' is to raise children fully prepared for life as an adult within our society, and to ensure that they have something to contribute. I believe that each child born in this world has something to contribute to our society, from the Prime Minister of a nation to the workers in the factories, all have an ability to strengthen and add to the benefit of our society.

To be able to contribute to and benefit our society, children need to be well balanced and have developed a sense of personal responsibility and duty. It is one of the father's primary roles to ensure that his children are being raised correctly, with a respect for authority and attitudes that are conducive to building and not destroying our society. Whether we are raising boys or raising girls we need to impart to them the values that will make them successful in life.

We often see people characterised on the TV, 'stereotypes' that are stunted in some way and not fully mature and ready for life in the world. These are the ones that are the 'butt' of jokes and that people all too readily laugh about, but I ask you the question, would you like your child to turn out like that?

Developing the character of your child is a marathon and not a 100 m sprint. It will take all the years at your disposal to form the attitudes and beliefs that they will need throughout their lives. These attitudes and beliefs are required to be understood and appreciated, that they might also pass them on to the next generation.

As your child grows it is important that we as parents don't do 'everything' for them, otherwise they may reach physical maturity without 'growing up' on the inside. One of the best ways to train your children is to delegate responsibilities to them as they grow. If they can handle those responsibilities well, then they can benefit by having a growing level of authority within their own lives.

When a child is born and for several years after that, they have their clothes chosen for them by an adult. But as the child grows and shows a level of responsibility in that area you can then entrust them (authority) with choosing their own clothes to wear (most of the time anyway).

As a child grows in their knowledge of numbers and money, you can get them to pay for the bread and milk at the local shop and count the change etc. As a child shows a growing level of maturity and compliance to the 'house rules', they can be rewarded with greater liberty by having their own keys etc.

All these examples show a concept that helps develop your child, bit by bit, stage by stage throughout life, in a way that will have them fully trained and ready to look after themselves and their own family later in life.

I believe that many times it may not be how your children turn out, but how their children turn out that may be the most defining judgement of your fathering skills.

Dads' Call to Action:

Give your children responsibilities around the home and reward them when they do them faithfully. This will begin a process to have them fully developed for life outside your home.

(Galatians 4 v1-2)

Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

TIP 36. CHILDREN NEED TIME

If I could simplify all that is said on these pages and condense much of what is written about the needs of children into only a few words, then one of those words would have to be 'time'. Children need time, and the time they need, should be quality time with their dad. Men should choose a parenting style that ensures that their spouse and children receive the time they need to ensure you all prosper as a family.

When we were young single men, we could pretty much do what we wanted with our spare time, we could go to the football, hang with our mates or simply kick back and do absolutely nothing if we wanted to. A single man's life is full of spare time but lacks the benefits that only a marriage can bring.

When we get married suddenly a lot of the spare time we had as a single man is now taken up with the great things that couples do. We receive the benefits of a married life, but at the expense of losing much of our spare time. When we begin raising children our remaining spare time mostly disappears, as we begin to do all the great things that a family does. Now we receive the benefits of family life, but at the further expense of our spare time.

You may be wondering why I am making these simple statements, about the loss of spare time and its relationship with the benefits gained through marriage and raising children. It is because many men refuse to let their spare time be taken away by family pursuits and insist on continuing life as if they were still a single man although they are a husband and a father.

These types of actions are a recipe for a failed marriage and a dysfunctional family and can only realistically be coined by the word 'selfish'. Selfishness is perhaps one of the greatest challenges that we face as men and parents, and it can effectively destroy our fruitfulness in these roles. Now I am not saying that a father can't still spend some time with his mates occasionally, or take in a football match etc., but if he does it all the time then his family will be missing out.

Families need time. For a marriage to be successful the couple need to take the time to work on their relationship. For a man to be successful as a father he needs to spend time with his children, loving them, caring for them, teaching them, enjoying them. It is not a choice between quality and quantity times, both are required. If you don't put in the quantity time you may never find the quality time you are trying to achieve. Ask your children how much time they need from you as their father, you may be surprised at the answer.

Dads' Call to Action:

Spend quantity and quality time with your family and you will reap the benefits of family life.

(Ecclesiastes 3 v 1)

To everything there is a season,

A time for every purpose under heaven:

TIP 37. BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Some men are born with tender hearts and some men develop them throughout life, and unfortunately there are some men who never achieve this high level of our humanity. Now we can often be impressed by the abilities of athletes who are paid to play football or cricket professionally, but we are constantly reminded that these men are less than perfect when their actions off the field are exposed publicly. The men that have most influenced my life over years rather than being sporting stars were men who were unashamedly soft-hearted and caring.

The world is full of men who are great leaders, or great orators, but in our modern world there seems to be a noticeable lack of men who allow the love of God to flow through them to their family. In my experience when we take the time to seriously consider those things that really matter to us as men, our love for our family is usually our top priority.

There are some men that couldn't care less if they are abusive to their children or other people, but thankfully they are in the minority. Most men want to be the best dad they can be and want to secure a bright future for their children. Most men love their children abundantly and would do anything at all to help them, but sadly many men lack the understanding or resources to fulfil their dream.

The fact that you are reading this is proof that you have a desire to be the best dad you can be, and that desire is honourable. But for most of us becoming the dad we really want to be is a lifelong process, and change comes periodically in our hearts and lives. We don't change overnight and become the world's best dad, as much as we would like to. We all bring baggage with us from the way we were brought up, and much of the baggage takes time to work through and overcome. If we have been brought up under a father figure that was abusive or violent etc., we may still carry the scars and even some of the same attitudes in our own life, this unfortunately is all too common.

If we have been brought up with a father figure who was a drug or alcohol abuser, we may have picked up some of those habits, and these also may take some time to overcome. Sometimes our fathers do things or say things that adversely shape our lives, and when we become fathers suddenly, we realise that those problems have become our problems too. None of us is perfect, we all have our faults. We are all on this journey called life together and the aim is to ensure that individually and corporately as members of humanity, we can make a worthy contribution while we are here and be fully prepared to move on to the next life in heaven.

But the process is often a slow one, and as men we are susceptible to becoming frustrated with the pace with which we may achieve change in our lives. If I could make one statement that you remember today, it would be 'be kind to yourself', as this is one of the best ways to stay on track. If we look at our development as a father as a marathon race and not a sprint, we will grasp much of the understanding we will need to achieve the change we desire to see in our own hearts and lives.

When we are teaching our children how to walk, we don't give up on them if they fall 10, 20 or even 100 times before they finally develop the skills required to walk. Neither should we give up on ourselves if we make a few mistakes along the way.

Being a dad means we will continually learn new things in our role as it changes through all the stages of child development, that change will continue in our lives perhaps all the way to becoming a great grandfather.

Dads' Call to Action:

Go easy on yourself if you make a few mistakes on the way, we all do. Remember if you fall off a horse the best thing you can do is get right back on and have another go.

(Matthew 13 v 52)

Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

TIP 38. INTERNET PROTECTION

I think that most people would agree that there are tremendous benefits coming from our current surge in technologies and advances in science, but as with most new products there can also be a down side. Everybody thought that 'Thalidomide' was a wonderful new drug that would help woman to overcome some medical conditions, but the world ended up with a generation of severely birth defected children.

In the same way we need to realise that there may be some unknown down sides of our current technologies that will only become evident in the future. The internet has been a wonderful tool for many millions of people around the world, and without it you would not be reading this page. But it is commonly known now that the internet can also be a terrible trap for unsuspecting users, with many hidden dangers. Some of the most recent studies into the growing use of social media and online games upon a young developing brain are posing serious questions about the long-term use of some areas available through the internet.

Having an unlimited supply of information readily available at your fingertips sounds fantastic, and as one who uses the internet daily, I have found it a great tool. The down side of the internet is that there is instant access to information and images that we do not want our children to be subjected to. Guarding young minds from 'adult' content is vital if we are to protect their innocence.

It is also very possible to inadvertently access pornographic images while doing a web page search for innocent subjects. Often these 'accidents' have been strategically planned by those who distribute pornography to trap innocent victims in their web. Like a spider's web, pornography is far too easy to get into and not easy to get out of.

These days it is often a school requirement to access information on the internet, therefore it is vital that we as parents ensure that our children are protected from the down side of the World Wide web. Fortunately, there are several things that we can do that can minimise the possibility of 'internet accidents' happening.

I would always encourage you as a father not to allow your children access to the internet without one of the parents being present, this is probably the safest way to safeguard your home from 'internet accidents'. Along the same line I would also encourage you not to allow internet access in the children's rooms, as a shut door can bring temptations even to young hearts and minds.

Another way to protect the family from 'internet accidents' is to place the online computer in a lounge or similar room where it can be easily seen by other members of the family. There are also programs that you can purchase that restrict the pages that can be viewed on the internet, by blocking access to inappropriate websites.

One of the evolving problems that are being identified on the internet is the culture of 'chat rooms'. On a chat room you can talk with other people over the internet through typing alone, and again although your children may have school friends contacting them legitimately on 'chat rooms', this can also be an opportunity for those who would pretend to be kids to lure children into dangerous situations.

As the father you are the head of the household, and your children look to you for protection. None of us as fathers would let a rapist or child molester into our homes or to have access to our kids, we would stand at the door and stop them anyway we could. The internet can be a sneaky back door access for those who would try to take advantage of our children, and we as fathers must stop them.

Dads' Call to Action:

Ensure that the family computer is set up in a place that is always easily seen by other members of the family. Oversight your children's internet access and use programs that protect them from dangerous and inappropriate content.

(Genesis 15 v 1)

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

TIP 39. TAKING THE FAMILY TEMPERATURE

Raising children and family life often feel like a roller coaster ride, you're up one day and down the next. There are always going to be great days as a parent and occasionally other times that you might consider looking for another family. I would encourage you always to stick with the one you've got, because the grass is never greener on the other side. It's often the challenges in life that seem to be the most difficult that bear the greatest fruit in eternity.

In every family home there develops an atmosphere, a sense or feeling that is both controlled by and influencing the actions of the family members. If there is a friendly and positive atmosphere in the home, then it is far more likely that the family members will get along well. If there is an atmosphere of anger and violence in the home, then the family members will be far more likely to live in that manner as well.

Some families that I have known in my days as a Pastor, lived in an atmosphere of fear and violence all their lives, and those actions continually played out within the family. It seemed as if they couldn't live differently from the atmosphere that surrounded them. Often these families lived in a neighbourhood that was filled with violence and high crime rates, and that atmosphere covered the entire area.

When people come to Christ, they have the power and influence of evil forces broken over their lives, and now can develop and change the atmosphere or feeling in their own home and surroundings. This is done in several ways including changing the way they live and the words they speak.

As a parent and father, we also need to become sensitive to and aware of the feeling or atmosphere that is in our homes. This atmosphere can change day by day or even hour by hour, but you can pick it as soon as you walk in the door. This is a part of developing discernment, which is available to every believer in Christ.

Once you sense that there is something wrong within the home, you should begin to pray for God's guidance and wisdom for what to do. Changing a negative atmosphere may require facing and dealing with the problems that caused it in the first place and bringing reconciliation between the warring factions.

Sometimes it can be an issue with only one member of the family, and you may just sense that something is not right with them. Again, pray first for God's help and then use wisdom in approaching the person and beginning discussions. If you have a close existing relationship with the child/person, it is usually a lot easier to get them to talk.

Listen, really listen to what they say, and you should be able to find out what is the real issue that they are facing, then offer support and encouragement and pray with them for God's help to overcome the problem. Often our family members need initially to have hope and encouragement imparted to help them to overcome the problem they are facing.

Sensing the atmosphere within the home and around individual lives is like taking their spiritual temperature. It is a sense that can be developed as we continue to walk with God and ask for this grace to be in our lives.

Dads' Call to Action:

Try to sense the feeling or atmosphere within your home when you walk through the door, and if needed use wisdom and encouragement to change it.

(Proverbs 17 v 14)

The beginning of strife is like releasing water;
Therefore, stop contention before a quarrel starts.

(Proverbs 14 v 29)

He who is slow to wrath has great understanding,
But he who is impulsive exalts folly.

TIP 40. HEAD OF THE HOME

Over the last 30-40 years there have been several well-established family structures and traditions that have been coming under constant attack by those opposed to doing family God's way. Probably none have come under so much attack as the role of the father as the head of the home. Raising children is much more effective when both parents are fully committed and present within the family.

A lot of the enmity began with the women's liberation movement in the 1970's, where feminism encouraged women to 'throw off the shackles of men's dominance' and become 'your own woman', by getting out of the home and having a career. The ideology of feminism able to get a foot in the door of many homes, and the unfortunate results are still being felt today with the widespread breakdown of the family unit.

When parents begin to believe that they are missing out on life by loving and looking after their children, a family disaster is on the horizon. If a wife begins to believe that their husband is trying to hold her back and stop her from having a fulfilling life, a marriage breakdown beckon.

Now I believe that some women are meant to have a career, and more power to them. The problem I have is when they are willing to sacrifice their family and their marriage for the passing glory of being able to 'be somebody'. Unfortunately, men are also often guilty of doing this, especially those who are workaholics.

There are well defined biblical roles within the family, and although the application of those roles may change from home to home, it is important to understand these so we can lay a foundation in the home that will last.

God believes in leadership. He does not call for a vote to see whether He should be Lord in heaven, The Creator of the earth and the Judge of mankind. As part of His creation we do not have a say in this, we simply accept this and benefit from a relationship with Him or reject it and suffer the consequences.

In the same way God has established that the man should be the head of the home, and his wife and family can either accept this and enjoy the benefits of it or reject it and suffer the consequences. The benefits to the wife and family include protection, provision and prayer covering among others.

As head of the home we need to protect our wife and family from any and all dangers, as much as it is humanly possible to do so. To do this we must firstly place our trust firmly in God's protection for us and the family. Time and time again in the Bible God shows Himself as a protector and a shield to His people.

As head of the home we also need to provide for our wife and family to the best of our ability. To do this we need to know God as our provider and know His promises to supply all our needs. An experiential knowledge of this takes all the stress out of being the bread winner for the home.

As head of the home we need to take on the responsibility of becoming the prayer covering for the family. We need to learn to watch over them daily in prayer asking for and believing in God's blessing in every area of their lives individually and corporately as a family.

As the head of the home the father is meant show his love in a practical way by daily laying down his own life for those of his family. This requires a substantial amount of self-sacrifice, and in this, as in all areas of life Jesus Christ is our great example.

When a wife and children see that the father submits his own life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, that he loves them and daily lays down his life for them, then they will find it easy to submit to his authority as head of the home. But if the father is selfish and merely seeks to dominate and control his family through fear then that family will find it very hard to submit to him as head of the home.

On the day of my marriage to my beautiful wife, she promised to love, honour and obey me as her husband, and I promised to lay down my life in service through the leadership role of being head of the home. True leadership is always service, and being a servant is easy when Jesus is on the inside.

Dads' Call to Action:

Lay down your life daily for your wife and family, and they will find it easy to submit to your authority as head of the home.

(Genesis 3 v 16)

To the woman He said:

"I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;

In pain you shall bring forth children;

Your desire shall be for your husband,

And he shall rule over you."

(Ephesians 5 v 22 - 25)

Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

TIP 41. WORKAHOLICS

Man, by nature is compelled to be a doer, we often need to overcome challenges and obstacles in life to feel a sense of achievement. For many men it is difficult to just to sit still and be, rather than do. This can be both a blessing and a curse. Being a doer can be a blessing in the fact that we can achieve a great deal through constant application to a task or goal and see the biggest mountains or obstacles fall. Being a doer can also become a curse if we allow an overzealous work ethic to begin to dominate our lives, at the expense of everything else, especially our family life.

Sometimes men can find solace in a work environment that they can control, especially if they are good at it. They can retreat from emotional or relationship issues that they may struggle with at home and throw themselves into their career. This can become a type of denial, when they constantly look to avoid the real issues of life and exchange it for a work environment where they are not required to input emotionally. This is often the life experience of the workaholic.

One of the downsides of becoming a workaholic is that you often miss out on the very thing that could give you a lasting sense of achievement, rather than the fleeting sense of achievement that comes through work. In business there is always going to be the need to close one more deal, get one more customer. In business, at the end of even the best month you can go from hero to zero very quickly.

Making money in business is never going to give a lasting sense of achievement, because deep down that is not what man longs for. We were created with a most basic and primary need 'to give and to receive love', and this is outworked in family life. Even with all its challenges and conflicts family life is God's way to bring a tremendous amount of fulfillment into the heart of a man.

I have never spoken to anyone lying on their deathbed who wishes they spent more time in the office, but many men regret not having spent more quality time with their wife and family. The power of the ego in man is often only broken when faced with a life or death situation. Suddenly everything that is truly important in life comes to the surface, and all else fades away.

All that we see around us is passing away, and our time here is very limited, how then should we live our lives? There are eternal consequences for every action or inaction, I would encourage you to always focus on eternal outcomes.

Dads' Call to Action:

Take the time to enjoy the journey and the wonderful joys of family life which God has given you. Stop and focus on the real issues.

(Ecclesiastes 2 v 17)

Therefore, I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

(Mark 6 v 31)

And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."

TIP 42. RESPECTING AUTHORITY

Probably one of the most widespread social problems of our day is the lack of respect for authority. This is blatantly evident in the youth culture of today and is often being re-enforced by TV programs and music lyrics. We should not be surprised at this, as we are now the 2nd generation since the 60's sexual and drug revolution across the world, and we are reaping the harvest that our parents sowed. Parenting is much more difficult today because of the attitudes and culture that arose from that era in history.

In the 60's and 70's there was a massive shift in society values and core beliefs, and many of the pillars of our society were thrown out and replaced by the philosophy of 'If it feels good do it!'. One of the major signs of the 60's revolution was the call for rebellion against 'the man' and the structure of society. I think if we were able to go 50 years back in time and see the strength and stability that our society enjoyed then, we would be shocked at how things have deteriorated so quickly.

There is little doubt that these actions were inspired by the evil forces that are at work in the earth today. Forces that are hell-bent on throwing out all God-ordained authority figures and replacing them with their own rule. This is simply a continuation of the age-old battle between good and evil that has been waged since the fall of man in The Garden of Eden.

All authority ultimately comes from God, and God has delegated the rule of the earth to man. Governments and Laws are established to bring order, provide benefits to the citizens of that country, and to punish those who are law breakers. Without a structured government system society breaks down and chaos rules, which is exactly what the evil forces want to happen.

When chaos rules it becomes the 'law of the jungle' and only the strong survive. Personal rights and liberties are lost and the person who has the biggest gun tells you how to live your life. Things like hospitals and schools and roads begin to disappear, and you are told what to do and what to believe.

Respect for authority begins in the home, if your children are not taught to show respect for their parents then they will certainly not show respect for the authority figures within the school, government or the church etc.

It is easier for children to show respect to their parents if their parents are loving, fair and compassionate toward them. The parents also need to practise what they preach if they are to have credibility in the children's eyes. Now I did not say that the parents need to be perfect, as that is a physical impossibility while we are still on this earth. When our children hear us apologise after we make mistakes, it helps them to see that we are all under God's authority.

Respect for authority comes through the realisation that they are there to help us and not just to control us. It is important to re-enforce this to your children, especially when they might not always appreciate or agree with decisions made by those in authority.

Now I am not advocating blind obedience to those in authority either, as I believe that those who have the rule over us must be held accountable for their actions also, and it is just as important that your children realise that with authority comes responsibility.

Teach your children to honour and respect the authorities in their lives, whether it be teachers, government, police or church authorities. This will greatly assist them to understand that the structures that have been set up both in heaven and on earth are given to help them in life.

Dads' Call to Action:

Explain clearly to your children that all authority comes from God, and as we submit to the authority God has given, we also submit to God.

(Exodus 20 v 12)

"Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

(Romans 13 v 1-4)

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgement on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

TIP 43. OFFLOADING CARES

For many fathers, the last thing they want to do when they get home from work, is to spend time with the children, playing with them or helping them with their homework. This is often because it is difficult for men to extract themselves mentally, from the stresses they face in their work environments, before they walk into their homes. One of the keys to raising children successfully is to ensure that you are at your best mentally and emotionally when you are with them.

The ability to offload the anxiety and problems of work, and be carefree, is a learned response that sadly, many men never achieve. It is however, an important ability to possess, as it enables us as men to think clearly and to be in the best position emotionally to assist our family, rather than hinder them.

An inability to offload the problems of work, all too often materialises itself in frustration and tiredness. This restricts many fathers from being able to give their best, in the home environment. Life is far too short, and our opportunities far too limited, to allow these precious times with our family to go to waste.

All too often when dads walk into the home, the family is waiting to see if they are in a good mood or not, before any 'family time' can begin. If we allow the anxiety and frustrations of work, or life in general to overcome us, we can begin to send the wrong messages to our family. They may think that 'they are the reason why daddy is sad', and a wedge begin to form in the relationship.

One of the best things we can do as a dad, if we 'lose it and blow our top', is to ask for the children's and their mother's forgiveness and explain simply that it was not them you were frustrated with. If we can find a way in our heart to leave the cares of work at work, we will avoid many problems in our home, and home after all, is the place where we find our greatest fulfilment.

If we as fathers can show by our own example, by offloading 'the cares of the world', it will go a long way to helping our children to cope with the stresses that they also will face in their future.

Dads' Call to Action:

Offload the cares and worries of the day on the way home, because your family deserves your very best. Ask for God's help in being free from frustration and stress and count the blessings you do have. It will cause your focus to be positive rather than negative.

(Matthew 13 v 22)

Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

TIP 44. AVOIDING DEBT

Balancing the family budget is not always easy, especially in a society that has enthusiastically accepted consumerism as the normal way of life. With the tremendous increase in advertising forms across the media, from billboards and telephone canvassing to text message advertising and naming rights for stadiums, we are being bombarded daily with the message to 'buy'. As consumers we are constantly offered credit cards as the 'easy' way to do business, and they are helpful, but only if you have the means to pay them off quickly.

With all this advertising in our culture there is also a rising 'expectation' of the standard of life that we should be achieving, including the type of house we should live in, the type of car we should drive etc. Often this 'expectation' is unrealistic in relation to the current financial position that families find themselves in. Many families attempt to achieve this 'standard of living' through getting further and further into debt by using a credit card or obtaining a personal loan.

A generation ago most families were much more reticent to take on personal debt, as they seemed to understand that debt is often a difficult weight to carry, and a weight that is ever present. However today it often seems that banks and other financial institutions are increasingly ready to loan you money, whether you are or aren't in a secure enough financial position to be able to repay it.

One of the major down sides about getting into debt is the pressure that it brings to bear upon the family and especially the father as the main bread winner. There are many ways that we can bring pressure upon ourselves, but one of the most common is through getting into debt. As parents we should be teaching our children how to be financially responsible and that is difficult to achieve if we are constantly in debt.

Financial pressure is one of the major contributing factors in a large percentage of marriage/family breakdowns in our society, and often could have been avoided. This type of pressure is often very difficult to deal with, especially when there are always going to be 'unexpected' bills arriving that add to the debt.

If we continually increased the pressure in a steam engine boiler, eventually that pressure would surpass the limits of the boiler to handle and there would be an explosion. This is often the way of life for those who are under financial pressure, and unless they can find some way to relieve the pressure, there is often an explosion.

Unfortunately, these explosions often happen around their families, and the very ones that they are trying to provide for are in the firing line. Many who find themselves in this position find a sense of relief through getting some financial counselling from a professional.

Staying out of debt begins with simply 'living within your means', or not spending more each week than you are earning. This most basic financial theory can help many families avoid falling into the trap of unserviceable levels of personal debt.

Dads' Call to Action:

Enjoy life and buy the things you need but realise that there is an emotional price to pay for getting into debt.

(Romans 13 v 8)

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

TIP 45. GOOD MANNERS

The way that we treat other people is often a reflection of how we see ourselves and expect to be treated. Many people don't really like themselves very much and so treat other people poorly as well. One of the signs of this that we see in our society is the deterioration of good manners, and generally a lack of respect and consideration toward our fellow man.

Good manners are never 'out of vogue' in a culture such as ours, as they are one of the cords that strengthen interpersonal relationships. Simply saying 'please' and 'thank you' can make all the difference in exchanges between people and pave the way to better communication. Whether we are a single parent, Co-parenting, divorced or part of a traditional marriage we need a parenting plan that includes raising children with good manners.

When people say 'thank you' when you have done something for them, it gives you a sense of being appreciated, and you will be much more open to exchanges with that person in the future. When requests come with a 'please', it often opens the door wider than the same request without one.

Saying 'excuse me' to someone if you need to get past them in an aisle is far better than dropping the shoulder and charging. A 'pardon me' never goes astray if you happen to burp during a family meal and shows a level of respect for those dining with you.

Children should also be taught that it is good manners to offer their seat to an adult and especially older people if there are none left on a bus trip etc. Our world could certainly benefit from a greater degree of 'chivalry' in society or just plain good manners.

Good manners are one of the basic ways that our children learn to show respect for authority and should be encouraged in pursuing this consistently throughout their lives.

Dads' Call to Action:

Raising our children with good manners from an early age is one of the keys to ensure that they will grow up and make you proud.

(Proverbs 20 v 11)

Even a child is known by his deeds,
Whether what he does is pure and right.

TIP 46. HAVING FUN WITH YOUR KIDS

I think it's worth mentioning that we as 'a father' should have an over-all goal pertaining to what we want to achieve as a dad. This should include but not be limited to the type of dad we want to become and most importantly how we want our child's life to eventually turn out. Everything we do as a father should have an over-all motivation of strengthening our relationship with our child and having fun with our kids is one of the most effective ways to strengthen that bond.

Raising children may sometimes feel like it's a chore, but if we learn to enjoy their company more it can become a pleasure to be a parent. If your child could pick just a few words to describe you as a father what would those words be?

Some children may say 'my dad is strict', others 'my dad goes to the gym', while still others may say 'my dad travels for work'. None of these areas identified are wrong in themselves and each of them have a place in life, but I put it to you that they should not be the primary way we are identified by our child.

The reason for that is because 'being strict', 'going to the gym' or 'travelling for work' don't strengthen your relational bond with your child, as these descriptions can be spoken without a sense of joy and love by your child. These statements can often be perceived as an explanation defining a reason why the relationship between you isn't really very close. These statements are 'impersonal' and there is no emotional attachment that comes with them.

However, if your child's response to the question above was 'my dad loves me' or 'my dad reads bedtime stories to me' or 'my dad is lots of fun', then it is easy to understand that these responses describe a relational bond that is strong and growing stronger. Many successful fathers are known primarily by their children as being fun to be around.

In our modern world many men's lives are so structured by work commitments that every aspect of it is written in their diary and every minute accounted for religiously. If this is an accurate description of your life, you should not be surprised if it seems to resemble that of 'a robot' a little more than that of a 'human being' in the eyes of a child.

Whatever we as 'the father' choose as being important is being observed by little eyes and registered in little hearts, and they are evaluating where they personally fit into your busy schedule and how important they are to you. It is for this reason that we must look closely at our own lifestyle choices and be open to make corrections when they are needed. As a father we need to show our children/family that they are our greatest priority in life and not just another scheduled meeting in our diary.

Dads' Call to Action:

Make sure you allocate time to turn off all your commitments and just enjoy the company of your children. The bond you create is worth much more than the money you could make.

(Mark 10 v 16)

And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

TIP 47. GOOD SONS

Who we are as an individual and as a parent, proceeds out of our inner life and flows out of our inner life, our heart. Whether as a parent we are raising boys or raising girls, we can be limited or released by the state of our past relationships and level of love that either flows or stagnates because of them. Broken relationships limit our ability to love freely, especially if the fracture is with our parents. It is therefore vitally important that we spend the time we need, to develop a strong relationship with our own fathers.

As a man and a parent, we need to honour our own fathers and appreciate them for their input in our lives. We should show them the same respect that we want our children to show us. This is not always easy to achieve and takes an effort, especially for those that may not have a close relationship with their fathers. For some this may not even be possible, but it is still important that we reconcile our relationships with our fathers in our own hearts.

We may need to forgive them or ask for their forgiveness in prayer if they are no longer alive or inaccessible, for unless we forgive others our heavenly Father will not forgive us. Reconciliation is one of the primary requirements for successful living, because it changes our heart first, and gives us insight into what is needed in our role as fathers.

When fractured relationships are repaired, the restricted flow of love from our heart is restored to full function. Then we as a man and a parent are able to enjoy the freedom and joy, we deserve and require in raising children. Our teaching on the Process of Forgiveness looks into this important issue in depth.

Dads' Call to Action:

Pray a Prayer of Forgiveness:" Dear God, I know that I need your forgiveness in areas of my own life, because I too am imperfect. And now I ask that you grant me your forgiveness, as I choose consciously to forgive my own father. I forgive him for all his imperfections, I pray that you will be gracious to him and show him your kindness, and I will honour him as my father and show him respect as you have commanded. Help me to do this Lord, in Jesus name I pray."

(Exodus 20 v 12)

"Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

(Matthew 6 v 14)

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

TIP 48. GOD'S HEART

All that we do upon this earth, especially those things that relate to our role as a parent and father, should reflect what our 'Heavenly Father' does in heaven. It is comforting to know that we are not limited to merely our own natural wisdom when it comes to raising children but have access to the divine wisdom of God in the Bible.

When Jesus was walking the earth, He came with a tremendous revelation about God, which completely changed the way mankind should see God. Before Jesus Christ came God was a 'Lawgiver and Judge', and people responded accordingly by attempting to keep all the rules and regulations given. Unfortunately, man in his natural state was never able to keep the Law of God and was ultimately destined for failure in his attempts.

God allowed men to try and graciously overlooked their failings, as He was really teaching them an important and life changing lesson. The lesson was that man must 'live by faith in God' and not by a religious observance of rites or religious rules. In this revelation Christianity was to stand separately from the religious world, as it revealed that true biblical Christianity was not merely another religion, but a very real personal relationship with God.

When Jesus Christ taught us, that God was 'our Father in Heaven', and loved us dearly as His children, the religious world was turned on its head. Jesus revealed that God was not some lifeless idol or mythical representation made up by man, but that He was 'the living God' who hears prayer and answers. He showed us that God is aware of even our smallest need, and desires for all men to come to Him believing in His care and provision.

We as fathers on the earth develop 'The Fathers' Heart' through getting to know Him more, and by allowing His 'Holy Spirit' access in our hearts to transform us each day more and more into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was the physical representation of God on this earth, and it is through Him that we have access to all the wisdom and mercy of Heaven.

There are many times in life and in our interpersonal relationships when we will need to draw upon the wisdom of God, which can be found in the scriptures of the Bible, and they are a sure and steady foundation to build our lives upon. But a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ opens the wonderful possibility of being able to receive answers in prayer and being able to hear from God Himself, as to how to apply those scriptures in our circumstances.

The closer we can get to 'Our Heavenly Father' the more wisdom and grace we will have to overcome every obstacle we face in life, and ultimately a wonderful entrance into heaven for ourselves and all whom we are able to lead there.

Dads' Call to Action:

Begin to read the Bible daily and to seek 'Him' who wrote it for us. Ask for 'His' wisdom and love to flow into your heart.

(James 1 v 5-8)

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

TIP 49. TRAILBLAZING

As fathers we need to choose a parenting plan or parenting style that we are confident will help and not hinder our family future, but what if we never had a great role model to learn from ourselves? For many men, the concepts and teachings contained in this series may seem like a mountain that is too hard to climb, because of the baggage they still carry from their own upbringing. For those men especially I am writing this teaching, in the hope that you can find some real encouragement in your hearts.

Every man in this nation has been brought up in one way or another, some have had a tremendous upbringing in a loving family, and others have been less fortunate. We live in a world that tells us that we are merely 'products' of the environment we have been brought up in, and that we don't have any real ability to change what we are, and the hand we have been dealt in life. I have found this teaching to be false in the extreme and denying the fundamental principle of personal accountability and choice.

Each one of us will have challenges throughout our lives, and many of them may seem to be insurmountable at the time, but when you bring God into the equation then 'all things are possible'. I heard someone once say, 'Man can change his mind but only God can change a heart', and this I have found to be true. The things that seem impossible to man, God can do 'in the twinkling of an eye'.

Some may think 'I would like to become a fantastic loving dad, but I was not brought up like that and these concepts are foreign to me'. To those men I would say that experience has shown that if you really desire to become that type of father to your children and if you will reach out to God and ask Him to bring the change in your heart, you can indeed become all that you hope for.

Even if your family may never have showed you the love and encouragement that you really needed in life, you can still become 'a trailblazer' in your own family and choose the direction you want to go in life. We as fathers have the authority and the ability with God's help to choose to have a loving and wonderful family, and to ensure that our children follow the trail that we have made.

Definitions of trailblazer: - someone who marks a trail by leaving blazes on trees- a pioneer: someone who helps to open a new line of research or technology or art

Some of us will need to be trailblazers in our family, to change from the direction our predecessors chose and make a new path for our own family to follow. Being a pioneer has many challenges, but the rewards of your decision will reverberate into future generations and they will thank you for it.

Dads' Call to Action:

Believe that God can finish that which He began, and this includes helping you to build a wonderful family

(1 Samuel 10 v 9)

So it was, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all those signs came to pass that day.

TIP 50. IN GOD'S HANDS

For those fathers that have been gifted with very soft hearts and those who are still developing them, it is important to understand that in all things we must put our trust in God. It is often difficult for fathers to extricate or distance themselves emotionally from the day to day challenges of family life and the pressures they bring. We are so intimately involved in family life that when we see one-member suffering or making wrong decisions, we often take it to heart and blame ourselves for the situation.

Now sometimes we may indeed have played a part in bringing about the problem, as none of us are perfect parents, but it is important not to compound the problem further by letting our emotions dictate the action we take. In every challenge of life, we can choose to handle it the best way we can as men, or we can enlist the help of our Heavenly Father by placing our trust in His ability and not our own.

I personally believe that God loves my children far more than I ever could, and that He always has what is best for them in mind. God is trying to get people into heaven, not trying to keep them out; otherwise He would not have sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins. God's love for them is complete, it is pure and not motivated by any selfishness at all, that is why we can entrust them to God's hands for safekeeping.

Sometimes the best thing we can do as a father is to get out of the way for a while and let God deal with our children; after all He has had the experience of raising billions of them. The softness of a father's heart will often try to shield our children from all of life's difficult experiences, but in doing that we may be hindering their growth and the path toward maturity.

Committing our children to God is not always easy to do emotionally, as men often find it difficult to give 'the reins' over to someone else. But when our children are securely placed into God's hands by faith, there comes an emotional freedom and clarity of mind that assists us greatly in our fathering role.

Dads' Call to Action:

Take the time to place your children safely into God's hands through prayer and let Him carry the weight. He is the best qualified for the job, and your faith will help Him to watch over their lives.

(Philippians 4 v 6-7)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

TIP 51. HOW WILL YOU BE REMEMBERED?

I think one of the more beneficial times I have had in my life was also perhaps one of the strangest. As a Christian minister I had to perform numerous funerals, both for those in my congregation and for those whom I had never met previously. There is a saying about two things you can be sure of in life, being 'Death and Taxes' and although I can't help you with the taxes part this teaching may assist you in making sure that your life and your death are one worthy of remembrance.

One of the things that always struck me was the words that people had inscribed upon their headstone, a lasting epitaph to a life lived. So, one day I went down to a local cemetery and spent a few hours looking at the headstones, reading the words that loving family members had written and considering how I wanted to be remembered after I had left this earth. It was a sobering time in my life and a time where I began to really identify the things that were important to me personally.

As a father I expect and hope that my children will survive long after me and that there will be generations of grandchildren and great grandchildren that will follow. This I believe is what we all want as fathers, but the question I ask is "How will you be remembered by your children?"

Will it be the memory of a father that never really had time for them, or a father that ran the family like it was a concentration camp? Or in the years to come will our children recall 'all the wonderful loving times we shared together as a family', and 'the deep sincerity of our father's love for us?'

We don't really have total control over how we will be remembered by our children, but we do have an opportunity each day to invest in 'loving and serving our family faithfully and preparing them both for this life, and heaven to come.' Parenting in our modern age is rarely easy, but the time and energy we invest into our family life will reap rewards that can last for generations.

Dads' Call to Action:

Take the time to look ahead 100 years from now and consider how you would like to be remembered. Allow your conclusion to motivate you in pursuing things that are truly worthwhile.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

To everything there is a season,

A time for every purpose under heaven:

A time to be born,

And a time to die;

A time to plant,

And a time to pluck what is planted;

TIP 52. FATHERING OVER THE WALL

Many men discover that as they focus more and more on being the best dad that they can be to their children, that their heart opens to the many possibilities that surround us every day. As our children grow up, they often bring their school friends around to play, or the kid's down the road want to play cricket or football in the backyard, and this may very well be a God ordained opportunity to share His love.

Children are very quick to pick up on the subtle differences that your home may have compared to their own, whether it is the style of house, the size of the TV screen or even more importantly the love that you show to your children. So many children these days are growing up without a father, or with one that may be struggling in the role, and the love and acceptance that you show to these children can make a tremendous difference in their life.

When love and fun are the staple diet at your house then don't be surprised if your house becomes a beacon to the whole neighbourhood. One of the keys to being effective in 'fathering over the wall' is to have a child friendly home, with things for the kids to do. Whether it be games, a pool or sports activities, it is important to create an environment where your children feel happy to bring their friends. This can also become strategically important as they continue to grow up and helps you to 'monitor' their friends and ensure that they are not being influenced in the wrong way.

It is amazing how even a smile or an encouraging word can change the destiny of a child and fill their heart with hope that perhaps there is a better life for them ahead. I believe heaven will be filled with people who had their lives touched by someone who had enough of God's love flowing for some of it to reach 'over the wall'.

Dads' Call to Action:

Be on the lookout for opportunities to share God's love freely with the friends of your children, it may begin as simply as giving them a smile or remembering their name, but it can be one of the very things God uses to bring them into His kingdom.

(Genesis 49 v 22)

Joseph is a fruitful bough,

A fruitful bough by a well;

His branches run over the wall.

(Malachi 4 v 6)

And he will turn

The hearts of the fathers to the children,

And the hearts of the children to their fathers,